

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 30, 2014

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki
Secretary of Veterans Affairs
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki,

I am deeply troubled by recent news reports in North Carolina about a software defect that allowed some veterans and servicemembers using eBenefits to see the personal information of other users. The VA's handling of personally identifiable information already has a troubled past; in 2006, Congress enacted a law requiring quarterly reports of VA data breaches after the theft of computer equipment exposed sensitive data of approximately 26.5 million veterans and active duty servicemembers.

With almost 770,000 veterans in North Carolina, the security of our veterans' personal information is extremely important to me. I am glad to hear that the VA is conducting a full review of this incident, but there are a number of outstanding questions that both my constituents and I would like addressed. In particular, I hope you can share with me:

- When the investigation will be completed,
- Whether the VA will be making the results public,
- What steps will be taken to notify any veterans whose information might have been compromised,
- Whether any similar incidents have previously occurred with the eBenefits system, and
- What steps the VA will be taking to prevent this kind of breach from happening again.

I am also interested in learning how this incident might affect the VA's efforts to reduce the backlog of disability claims. The VA's *Strategic Plan to Eliminate the Compensation Claims Backlog* states, "A crucially important element of our technology plan is the ability to file an on-line claim through a new DoD-VA shared self-service portal called eBenefits." While the VA's internal system for adjudicating claims may not have been affected, I am concerned that if veterans question the security of eBenefits, they may choose less expedient methods. Particularly on the heels of high-profile data breaches in the private sector, I fear that diminished trust in the safety of eBenefits would discourage veterans from utilizing the online system, which the VA has deemed a critical piece of the puzzle in eliminating the backlog.

The security of our veterans' personal information must be a top priority. I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to working with you to address it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Kay R. Hagan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Kay R. Hagan
United States Senator